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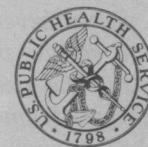
AIDS among women to double by 2000 — Opportunistic infection drug research funds approved by NIAID — FDA standardizes testing of AIDS workers' gloves — Suppressed anger believed more deadly to women — New dietary guidelines released by USDA and DHHS — Slow-release iron pill developed to benefit anemic women in third world — PHS to share Hansen's center with U.S. prisoners — Institute of Medicine panel debunks pessimism about health outlook for the aged — Benefits of improved aging not distributed equally among rich and poor — Library of Medicine offers bibliographies on ills of the elderly, prison health care — NIH study challenges link between contraception and preeclampsia — NICHD funds seven new child research centers — PHS focuses on preventing and treating oral diseases among adults and children — NIH funds construction at research facilities — HHS sets new rules for student loan defaults

COVER 3: New PHS report reviews benefits, risks of fluoride



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New PHS Report Reviews Benefits, Risks of Fluoride

A comprehensive year-long investigation by the Public Health Service found no evidence establishing an association between fluoride and cancer in human beings. James O. Mason, MD, Assistant Secretary for Health, requested the study in February 1990 because of a preliminary finding of a rare cancer in four male test rats in groups fed high doses of fluoride over their lifetimes.

In releasing the study in February 1991, Dr. Mason said, "If fluoride presents any risks to the public at the levels to which the vast majority of us are exposed, those risks are so small that they have been impossible to detect in the epidemiologic studies to date. In contrast, the benefits are great and easy to detect."

The study once again confirmed that fluoride in water plays a central role in preventing tooth decay, thereby reducing abscesses and extractions and providing improved health to all, especially poor children. Although other factors may also have been at work, the average child today has just over three tooth surfaces affected by decay. Before fluoridation in the mid-1940s, a child of 6 to 15 years might have 10 tooth surfaces affected.

Dr. Mason recommended that municipalities "continue the addition of fluoride to water supplies wherever it is deficient. "However," he said, "more is not necessarily better. Especially in those areas of the United States where fluorides are naturally present at higher than recommended levels, kids do not need additional systemic fluoride and risk a discoloration, or mottling, of the teeth."

The report says that mottling, called dental fluorosis, has increased in some parts of the United States in recent years.

The PHS study found no confirmation in epidemiologic studies of the "equivocal" finding of osteosarcoma in four male rats

(1 of 50 given water containing 100 ppm sodium fluoride and 3 of 80 given water containing 175 ppm) over their lifetimes during a research project of the National Toxicology Program at Research Triangle Park, NC. The finding also was not observed among female rats or mice of either sex. The reviewers said that the NTP study and another long-range animal study "fail to establish an association between fluoride and cancer."

In deciding that there was no human cancer association shown, the PHS group reviewed the results of more than 50 human epidemiology studies that have been produced over the past 40 years. These include new studies of bone cancer and other malignancies conducted for this study by the National Cancer Institute, a part of the Public Health Service.

There are about 750 cases of osteosarcoma, a rare form of bone cancer, in Americans each year. Although the number appears to have increased, no association was found with the onset of fluoridation.

The review was said to be the most comprehensive ever focused by the Federal Government on fluorides. The review was conducted under the direction of an ad hoc subcommittee of the Committee to Coordinate Environmental and Health Related Programs, which is made up of agency heads and selected representatives from throughout the Public Health Service. The study was headed by Frank E. Young, MD, PhD, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health, Science, and Environment.

Copies of the 134-page publication, "Review of Fluoride Benefits and Risks" have been deposited with the libraries of U.S. schools of dentistry and medicine. Single free copies can be requested from the Office of Communications, National Institute of Dental Research, Room 2C-35, Building 31, National Institutes of Health, 9000 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, MD 20892.

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